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ABSTRACT

Since the essence of teaching is communication, one of the core areas of the liberal arts component of teacher education should be speech communication. Teachers need oral communication skills to effectively facilitate learning, manage the classroom, and make professional decisions. A course designed to be both theoretical and practical--providing an understanding of communication principles and practice in applying those principles--can develop in teachers an understanding of the communication process in the classroom, a greater awareness of the impact of their communication on students, and a variety of communication skills applicable to the classroom. Units to be covered could include (1) human communication in the education environment, (2) interpersonal communication in the classroom, (3) listening, (4) nonverbal communication in the classroom, (5) information dispensing in the classroom, (6) leading classroom discussions, (7) small group communication in the classroom, (8) communicative reading in the classroom, (9) teacher influence in the classroom, (10) communication barriers in the classroom, and (11) systematic observation in the classroom. (The paper includes a course outline as well as sample activities for each unit.) (HOD)

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Liberal Arts and Teacher Education

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LIBERAL ARTS AND TEACHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, several reports on this nation's lack of educational excellence have been forthcoming. On the secondary education level, oral communication plays an important role. Adler (1982) in The Paideia Proposal, included oral communication as a part of instruction for all students. The College Board (1983) listed listening and speaking as one of its six basic competencies needed for college. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) recommended oral communication as a part of the high school English program. Boyer (1983) suggests that an essential goal of the high school should be to "help all students develop the capacity to think critically and communicate effectively through a mastery of language." (5)

In recent months, three major reports on undergraduate education have also suggested a lack of educational excellence. In October 1984, a study group established by the National Institute of Education outlined a series of "warning signals" indicating that the quality of undergraduate education had declined (The Chronicle of Higher Education, October 24, 1984). One month later, J. Bennett, then head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, issued a report indicating a decline in learning in the humanities (The Chronicle of Higher Education, November 28, 1984). Most recently, a committee of the Association of American Colleges called for college and university faculties to help restore integrity to the bachelor's degree (The Chronicle of Higher Education, February 13, 1985). This final report proposes a minimum required program of study for all students. Among these minimum requirements is

literacy: A bachelor's degree should mean that its holders can read, write, and speak at levels of distinction and have been given many opportunities to learn how.

One of the major "causes" suggested in most reports for the problems in our educational system is lack of teacher preparation and a de-emphasis on the importance of teaching. This paper will argue that one of the major missing areas of a teacher's liberal arts education is speech communication.

LIBERAL ARTS AND TEACHER EDUCATION

Liberal arts skills are interdisciplinary abilities involving many areas of human development (cognitive, affective, social, moral, and psychological). They are transferable, functional abilities required in many different situations and can be acquired through education and training.

Central to a liberal arts education is speech communication. Hostettler (1980) indicates that, "to understand speech is 'to understand the essence of our humanity'" (p. 346). Dance argues:

The student who is denied study and experience in speech communication and in its subject matter of spoken language, is essentially denies the essence of a liberal education. Speech communication, the study of spoken language, is one of the foundations of a liberal education and is a basic requirement of all programs which intend to produce a liberally educated human and humane being. (1980, p.331)

In their profile for excellence for teacher education, members of the National Education Association (1982) suggested that all teacher education programs should have three integrated components: liberal arts, at least one subject or teaching level specialty and a professional curriculum.

The essence of teaching is communication. Thus, one of the core areas of the liberal arts component of teacher education should be speech communication. In recent years there has been some "calls for" a focusing on the oral communication competencies for teachers (Forster and Sloan, 1979; National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1979). Yet, many teacher education programs do not require courses in speech communication or assess a teacher's communication skills (McCaleb, 19).

Teachers perform three major functions in the classroom. They facilitate learning, manage the classroom and make decisions. The National Education Association provides a sample of actions taken by teachers as they perform these three functions:

1. Facilitating Learning

Teachers:

- *Know the unique characteristics of their students and draw on this knowledge to promote learning
- *Identify students' levels of achievement in subject matter and provide instruction and activities appropriate to those levels
- *Identify students' learning problems and provide instruction for overcoming them
- *Identify student interests and use them to promote learning
- *Work with students individually when appropriate
- *Organize groups which enhance learning
- *Draw on a variety of techniques, materials, and technology to accommodate different learning styles
- *Use questioning techniques and plan learning experience which encourage thinking and problem-solving skills
- *Present subject matter.

2. Managing the Classroom

Teachers:

- *Organize the classroom to stimulate learning and to foster discipline
- *Evaluate classroom conditions and make adjustments when necessary
- *Provide opportunities for communication with parents and the community

- *Communicate with special service personnel and call upon them when necessary
- *Use community agencies and refer students when appropriate
- *Maintain student records for instructional purposes
- *Facilitate the work of classroom aides, volunteers, and para-professionals.

3. Making Professional Decisions

Teachers:

- *Decide what to teach within and across subject areas within the context of available curriculum guides
- *Select and present/use materials and equipment
- *Plan priorities for the day
- *Reorganize activities as necessary
- *Use student assessment materials for instructional purposes
- *Anticipate the need for and draw on the abilities of special school service personnel such as school nurse, psychologist, social worker, librarian/media specialist, and guidance counselor
- *Decide when, where, and how to work at the local, state, and federal levels for educational improvement
- *Decide how to work with professional organizations, the school community, and the public-at-large to promote action on educational problems
- *Decide how to deal with the external conditions which impact their roles as a teacher
- *Decide how to deal with political, economic, social, and professional factors that affect their ability to function in the classroom. (1982, p. 11-12)

Notice how many of these are communication skills or are skills dependent on an ability to communicate effectively. Without training in oral communication skills, one wonders how effectively teachers can perform these functions.

CURRICULUM

What would a course in speech communication for teachers "look like"? The course outlined in the remainder of this paper presents

several communication skills essential for effective teaching. The course is designed to be both theoretical and practical - providing an understanding of communication principles and practice in applying those principles (See Cooper, 1981; 1984 for complete information).

Course Description

This course designed for teachers in all disciplines. Students learn communication concepts applicable to the classroom and communication skills necessary to communicate effectively in the classroom. The teaching methods include all those studies in the course itself - lecture, small group, discussion, structured experiences, and course readings. The course provides students both a cognitive and an experiential understanding of the role of communication in the classroom.

Course Goals

The course is designed to develop in teachers an understanding of the communication process in the classroom, a greater awareness of the impact of their communication on students, and a variety of communication skills applicable to the classroom.

Outline of Course Units

Unit I - Human Communication in the Education Environment

This unit presents a general overview of the communication process. Two theoretical perspectives - systems and symbolic interaction- are presented and related specifically to the classroom. A definition of communication in general, and instructional communication specifically, are also discussed. A major emphasis of this unit is the importance of communication to effective teaching.

Sample Activity: Keep a journal in which you enter notes from your readings, as well as observations, articles, poems, short stories, cartoon, etc. about communication. The purpose of this journal is to help you analyze your own communication behavior and that of others as well. It should include anything that will help you meet this objective.

Unit II - Interpersonal Communication in the Classroom

In our work with students it may be the quality of our relationship with them, not the content we teach, that is the most significant element determining our effectiveness. We build these relationships through face-to-face communication with our students - through interpersonal communication.

The importance of the relationship message for teachers is evident. The relationships we create with our students affect us, our students and the educational outcomes of our instruction. Much research suggests that when a teachers' communication response to students is one of "I accept you," the achievement of students is enhanced.

Several communication variables contribute to building a positive relationship between student and teacher - self-concept, self-disclosure, perception and language and meaning. In this unit, each of the variables are examined.

Sample Activity: Consider the words student and teacher. List as many meanings of these two words as you can. Compare your list of meanings with other students in class.

Unit III - Listening

Teachers need to understand that listening is much more than hearing. Listening is a four step process - hearing, interpreting, evaluating, and responding. In addition, a major portion of our time each day is spent listening. In the classroom listening is the main channel of communication. The types of listening, barriers to listening, the concept of and skills involved in active listening, and methods of improving their own listening are all areas covered in this unit.

Sample Activity: Provide students with a classroom case study in which poor listening inhibits effective communication. Ask students to analyze the factual, semantic, mental, and physical barriers to listening and means to combat each.

Unit IV - Nonverbal Communication in the Classroom

Some researchers indicate that 65% of the meaning one receives from a speaker's message is communicated nonverbally. Nonverbal communication areas discussed include proxemics, environmental factors, chronemics, physical characteristics, artifacts, kinesics, touch and paralanguage.

Sample Activity: Draw the seating arrangement in this class. How does this arrangement affect the communication taking place?

Unit V - Information Dispensing in the Classroom

Lecturing, although often maligned as a teaching method, can be advantageous. Lecture is neither inherently good or bad. When used appropriately it allows the instructor to present information not available elsewhere, present a framework for organizing learning, introduce content that will be developed via some other teaching method, and conserve time.

All teachers need to know how to clearly dispense information. In addition to lecturing, information dispensing includes making assignments, giving directions, presenting demonstrations, and explaining procedures.

Sample Activity: Microteach utilizing a lecture method. After viewing the videotape, analyze your strengths and weaknesses.

Unit VI - Leading Classroom Discussions

Perhaps one of the most difficult teaching methods to master is the discussion method. As teachers, most of us would like our pupils to participate more, ask more thoughtful questions, or engage in critical thinking more often. Students can, but we as teachers need to provide them the opportunity to do so. The discussion method provides such an opportunity.

Sample Activity: Tape a classroom discussion (at least 15 minutes) in which you are involved. Classify the questions asked according to: 1) student initiated or teacher initiated; 2) level on Bloom's Taxonomy. What do your "findings" tell you about classroom discussion?

Unit VII - Small Group Communication in the Classroom

Overview: Much of our lives are spent in groups-family, peer and professional groups. We are socialized and obtain our identity through our communication within groups. Because of the pervasiveness of groups in our life, it is important that our students are provided with experiences in small group communication. Much of what we learn about ourselves is learned through interaction in groups. Our image of self mirrored by others is viewed in the small groups to which we belong. In addition, language is used to rehearse and adapt to problems (remember the symbolic interaction perspective). The more opportunities provided for the students to "try out" behavior in small groups and to internalize the mirrored reactions of others to these behaviors, the more effective communicators our students can be.

Sample Activity: In a microteaching situation, teach using the small group approach. Divide the class into groups, choose a task for the groups to complete. How effective were you in utilizing this approach? Did you feel comfortable? Did your groups find the experience worthwhile? What changes would you make if you used this approach again?

Unit VIII - Communicative Reading in the Classroom

All teachers should use the opportunity to read to his/her class. Reading aloud can be used to introduce a unit of instruction, to help explain a concept, to motivate students, and to simply provide enjoyment and appreciation of literature.

However, reading aloud - communicative reading - involves more than simply vocalizing words. It requires an understanding and appreciation of the literature being read. It demands careful preparation so that you can communicate the literature through voice and body to elicit the appropriate response from your students.

Sample Activity: Review your school experiences. Consider a time when an instructor utilized communicative reading. For what purpose was it used: Did you enjoy it? Why or why not? What effect did the use of communicative reading have on your motivation to learn? Your feelings for the class? For the instructor?

Unit IX - Teacher Influence in the Classroom

As teachers we are not simply "fountains of Knowledge". Learning does not occur only on the intellectual level. Student attitudes and teacher attitudes influence the learning process. Teachers have a great influence over their students - the knowledge they acquire; the skills they master; and their attitudes toward self, others and learning. In very subtle ways - by who we are, the way we communicate, and the teaching methods we employ - we influence our students. Teachers must strive to positively influence their students, since student attitudes influence their self-concepts and their learning.

Sample Activity: consider the teacher who has influenced you the most. What sort of person was he/she? Why was their influence so great? Write your answer in your journal.

Unit X - Communication Barriers in the Classroom

The teaching-learning process is primarily a communication process that relies largely on the interactive behaviors of students and teachers. Any variable that prohibits effective communication can adversely affect the learning process. In this unit, several barriers to effective communication - communication apprehension, receiver apprehension, sexism, teacher expectancy, and student expectancy are discussed.

Sample Activity: Think about your educational experiences. In which classes did you communicate most?

Least? Analyze the variables of the educational environment in each class. Why did you communicate? Why did you not communicate?

Unit XI - Systematic Observation in the Classroom

Numerous studies indicate that teacher use of systematic observation instruments can change teacher behavior. For example, teachers become more flexible, more accepting, less critical, more sensitive to pupil attitudes, and actively encourage student initiated comments after using systematic observation. In addition, the use of systematic observation by teachers has been linked to increased student learning.

Sample Activity: In a microteaching situation, have another student or teacher observe you, utilizing a systematic observation instrument. Discuss the observer's findings. What have you learned about your teaching? Which behaviors would you like to change? Why? Which behaviors would you like to maintain? Why?

CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested that speech communication is a liberal art. Teachers, since a major proportion of their preparation should be in the liberal arts, need training in speech communication. Communication in the classroom is a complex process, requiring of the teacher a basic understanding of communication concepts and a repertoire of communication skills. The course outline here is designed to enable prospective teachers and/or teachers in the field to develop their understanding of communication and increase their communication skills.

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